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Interview with Shawn Dailey

Shawn Dailey

Lisa M. Groesz

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Researcher's name: Lisa M. Groesz
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Place: His office, Alumni Relations, Gambier, 3:30pm
Co-workers present: None

LG: Interviewing Sean Dailey February 8, 2001. So how long have you been preserving?

SD: Um, four or five years now.

LG: Okay, was it something your parents had done?

SD: Yeah, my mom canned growing up. Uh, in fact, I was thinking of what I was going to tell you. The questions you might ask.

LG: Oh.

SD: My mom was the consummate canner. She would try and can everything. And she would take the canned jelly and stuff to the fair. And actually what made me think of this story was, I was canning asparagus probably, a couple days ago. And asparagus kind of stands up nice in the jar. And I remember, my mom always wins jellies hands down. This is an Indiana state fair. And she was trying to win green beans or something, something in the vegetables category, I can't remember. So, and she tried several years and couldn't win. And she didn't know what they were looking for. So one year, she cut all her green beans to like the exact same length and like stacked them in the can she was going to submit.

LG: He he he.

SD: In the cans, so these two little layers of green beans like, stacked them perfectly lined up. As I remember, it didn't help but she won blackberry preserves or something like that.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: So, yeah, and then um, for a while she did, growing up I guess maybe it's one of those things, when you get busy, it is the first thing to go. And, um, convenience, provided that you have the money to buy the food. So growing up I don't remember, I mean she always canned green beans and, um, spaghetti, spaghetti sauce. But not like she did when I was little when she canned everything that would be growing in the garden. And now she is getting back to that. She cans spaghetti sauce again, an green beans, and salsa and some of the more common stuff but not like peaches and strawberries or uh, peaches and cherries and stuff like that.

LG: So why did you begin four years ago?

SD: You know, it was right after I left home. Not right after I left home but right after I stopped going home for the summers. Now, and my wife and I were living in an apartment in Columbus. And it just was summer time and we put some tomato plants outside because of course we didn't have a garden, we were in an apartment in Columbus. But we put some tomato plants outside in pots. And, um, and it just seemed like, I just wanted to can. I wanted to make spaghetti sauce. And I had become accustomed to eating good, home canned food and

LG: Right.

SD: you know, where all the ingredients are fresh and, um, it really like, for me, that is one of the number one reasons I can, just for quality of food. Uh, even beyond the cost benefits of it. I think that's probably the number one thing. I mean, a lot of things you can buy, you can go to discount supermarkets and get the same amount of food for less but not the same quality of food. So that's probably one of the number one factors. And, um, that year I did spaghetti sauce and that's about it. I don't think I did anything the year after that. Then when we moved back to Mt. Vernon which would be about two years ago, we had a small garden at my Dad's place so we did green beans and um, we bought cherries and peaches from the farm market. And, again, you don't come out ahead cost wise but you get much much better food than you can buy. So there is that and we did salsa and tomatoes. About any sort of tomato product, I now can. And in all its forms: whole tomatoes, diced tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato paste. Um, salsa. And I think that's about it. I got, this year will be the biggest year yet. So, um, in which case I will probably can at least 100 quarts worth of stuff, you know, down in the pints and half pints, but something close to that. It's hard to that because I have half pint jars. And the jars are always most expensive. For me, I do it as a cost factor too. Because once you have the jars, now if you have the jars and you grow your own stuff, I mean you can come out ahead because you buy a 99 cent packet of seeds, you know, and

LG: Right.

SD: And say something like green beans and that will plant something like two rows of green beans which will make, you know, ten or fifteen, depending on how many harvests you get off them, ten or fifteen pints, and then you've got about a dime a can in the lid. So, easily, you can get 20 cents for a pint of green beans.

LG: And now everything comes out of your own garden?

SD: No, we still buy some stuff. We live in town so we have a small, we have several gardens. We eat a lot of, over the summer our grocery bill is virtually nothing. We buy meat and some of the other stuff that you can't really grow. Rice. But pretty much we eat mainly fresh salads and anything we can grow in our garden. So, no, we still buy some stuff. Like I said, peaches and, um, cherries, we always buy. And asparagus we bought. And that's the other nice thing. We save some money because when something goes on sale that we want to can, we'll buy a lot of it and then can it and then later. Like asparagus went on sale for \$1.99 a pound where it is normally \$2.99, \$3.99, it's a fairly

expensive item. So it goes on sale for \$1.99 a pound. We buy five or six pounds and can it and then we get to eat it at the price as long as we can. And buying in bulk is part of canning. I mean, if you do can stuff that you buy, you buy in bulk for cheaper prices. So, yeah but, eventually I would like to plant my own fruit trees. That's just not an option in town. When I grew up, we had cherry trees and apple trees and peach trees and plum trees, which we never canned plums but everything that we wanted we would pick like 5 gallons worth of cherries off of the thirty year old cherry tree. And now it's kind of frustrating to be back at the beginning.

LG: Right, right.

SD: Because it's like, we are in town so we can't plant any trees really without shading our lot. In which case, we couldn't grow vegetables.

LG: Yeah.

SD: So, um, when we move up in the country, we'll start planting stuff like fruit trees. Then you have to wait for them to mature. But asparagus is another thing. We plant it but then it takes about 3 years before you can start harvesting. So you just have to kind of wait it out and let it take up space where you could plant other stuff. Asparagus is the place where, if you like asparagus and would buy it normally, home canning is where you will come ahead and asparagus spaghetti sauce. Spaghetti sauce is 2.00, 2.50 a jar whereas you can make it for 15 or 20 cents. Same with asparagus. Asparagus is \$3, \$4 bucks a pound almost always and you can grow it and can it, once you have the jars, essentially a dime. Because it's a perennial, comes back every year so, things like that, you come out ahead. And then we freeze some stuff which is, just because it lends itself better to freezing than it does.

LG: So you freeze just based on taste? Or on ease?

SD: Or, this is the funny thing. You start losing money when you run a freezer. Because you, um, well I shouldn't say you start losing money, but you really have to keep it full and you have to freeze a lot of stuff and eat all that stuff to come out ahead because your freezer costs \$30 to \$40 a year to run.

LG: Oh wow.

SD: The electricity.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: So a lot of people don't, won't, freeze anything. And will just take the taste difference with canning things. Things like broccoli, cauliflower, stuff like that, all kind of develops a strong odor, well not really an odor, you can still eat it but it's different than it would be fresh or frozen. So we freeze that. We freeze, um, peppers, because if you use it in anything that requires it to be somewhat crisp, anything you can becomes

cooked. So, that's, spinach is another thing. You can't really eat canned spinach. You can't really preserve it. There's no way to preserve lettuces. You just have to let them go bad. Strawberries I think freeze better than they can. Unless you are going to make something like a syrup. Or, um, some sort of strawberry jam. But if you want to freeze whole strawberries later to eat on top of cereal or something like that, they're much better frozen than they are canned. Um, corn we freeze. Um, just because I think it tastes better. Corn cans very well too but I just like the taste of it. And, you don't have to buy a jar of it when you freeze. So if you freeze a lot of stuff, you don't have to deal with the expense of the jar. The jar is the most expensive thing, ranging anywhere from \$.25 to a \$1 a jar depending on the jar that you buy. And that right there, the first year that you buy it puts you ahead. Now, we try and buy ours at garage sales. Now it's generally the case, and it's sad, that husband and wife and the wife dies. And she's had thousand of canning jars and the husband doesn't know how to can. So he sells them all. And you can buy them at a dime, you know, a dime apiece or less. You know, and you just kinda, we buy them wherever we can. Because eventually, we can more and more and they last, um, like this year, one thing that we always do is pear butter. Um, but we got so many free pears last year that I think we have 15 ½ pints which will last for years. I've been giving them away for presents. I almost bought you one today.

LG: He he he.

SD: And actually I would have but I just didn't think about it.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Um, yeah, so some things last more than, well, last year I didn't can tomatoes because I canned so many the year before that. Whole tomatoes that I just have left over.

LG: Hm hmm.

SD: And eventually there is some point that they won't be good canned but I haven't reached it. We tend to eat it in the course of a year or two. They say that fruits go a lot faster than vegetables do. Low acid foods go much faster than high acid foods. In fact, it is much more difficult to can stuff like green beans as opposed to tomatoes. Tomatoes you can pretty much boil and that will seal it and they will stay for years.

LG: Right. And that's something that the pressure canner has helped too.

SD: Right, you really. In fact the US Department of Agriculture won't approve canning low acid foods by water bath because it only heats up to 212. Uh, which will kill bacterialism (sp) if you go long enough but it's not really, you are taking your chances

LG: Yeah.

SD: on it. Where as a pressure canner under 15 pounds pressure or 10 pounds pressure, will go up to 243. But still, um, some things, green beans even at that temperature, you

have to put them in for 45 minutes, I think. So, whereas, you do something like pickles which are in a brine, and you leave them in for 5 or ten minutes. In the water bath canner is 212 degrees and you take them back out. So some things, fruits, cherries, are very quick. Peaches take a little bit longer but are still not like the high pressure. If you want to can really low acid foods like, um, squash or something like that. You'll often times be at an hour and ten minutes or an hour and twenty minutes at ten pounds pressure. So, things like that we just freeze because it's easier. But you know, the pressure canner, and the pressure canner going back to costs, is much more efficient. Um, you figure, we use a gas stove. Um, if you run a water bath canner and you've got 3 gallons of water in there, you have to leave your burner on a for a long time to heat it up. Whereas in a pressure canner, you are only heating about two to three quarts of water. I mean, you put the lid on and as soon as it builds up to, um, ten pounds pressure, you turn it almost completely off. So in the remaining time, you use much, you know but the gas is so cheap so that is not the huge factor. But you know, anything that makes it quicker and easier. The other thing, you don't have all of that steam dumping out into your house the way you do when you use the water bath canner. Uh, and if you have air conditioning, which we don't, but that would more than likely make your air conditioner run and get expensive. And those are things people tend to lose track of. I'm perhaps a little more anal so I watch everything, you know. I'm thinking, how much gas am I burning now? Is it in nickels, in dimes?

LG: He he he.

SD: For five quarts, hm. So, but, you know, all things considered, I think, we do it for the cost factor too, so, um, and I would say, we can more often than not. Once we have, once we stop buying things, we most certainly will. My interests extend far beyond that. I grew up on a farm so we always had chickens, we had cows. And we slaughtered the chickens and the cows.

LG: Hm hmm.

SD: So we had chicken and we had beef. And it was like, we didn't do any of our own dairy products, but we were much closer to self-sufficiency

LG: Right.

SD: Then most people ever get. And, um, you also get an appreciation for where you're food comes from. Whereas for most Americans, food comes from the grocery store, not the farmer who is out in the fields growing it. So that's, it's a different perspective. You appreciate food more. It means something different than just tasting goods. It's a way of surviving.

LG: And often it's healthier because you have control over what's going in it.

SD: Well you don't have preservatives generally.

LG: Right.

SD: I mean, some things do call for preservatives. Um, but there's almost a way to do it without it. And in general you're preservatives you use are sugar or vinegar which are more natural preservatives than, you know, whatever they tend to, hydrexaline you know or whatever they use to preserve it.

LG: Right, right.

SD: So, um, I like that. And I think I'm going to try and can and freeze most of our baby food. So, which we have a, my wife is six months pregnant now. So we have one coming in about three months so I figure, um, baby food I think, we're going to come out way ahead in that.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Because I think you can buy, I mean, you can buy two pounds of carrots. And I mean you can just buy them in the store, not just grow them yourself, for like a 1.50 or something like that and that would make like, I don't know, probably 6 pints, 5 or 6 pints of canned carrots, which in turn would maybe make, six servings of baby food or something like that. Whereas that might be 50 cents a piece and that's three dollars. So the savings is a \$1.50 but if that's a \$1.50 every three days or a \$1.50 a week, that quickly adds up. So, and, we have some things that you can grow. Like you can grow sweet potatoes for virtually nothing. Pounds and pounds of them.

LG: Right, right.

SD: And I think I read somewhere that it takes about four pounds of sweet potatoes to make a month's worth of baby food. Of that particular variety.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Because you don't want to feed him sweet potatoes ever day.

LG: He he.

SD: You know, this kid who only likes sweet potatoes. But, um, so, I try and make it as cost effective as possible. Um, I hope to buy a green house in the near future. Because if you have to pay for plants, I mean it's really silly. But if you figure, and really I try to push the limits of it. But if you buy, tomato plants are generally 4 for 99 cents, so you buy that, which four tomato plants will can lots and lots of tomatoes if you keep canning all summer. The downside is that you have to do it in small batches. But you can probably most of what you needed for two people with four tomato plants. So for 99 cents, it is pretty cost effective. But then you can grow the seeds for free in a green house and then again you have even more control over what's put on them and, um, and that's even part of it. Even if you buy foods in the grocery store that have, um, no preservatives in them. You don't know what was put on the plants to start with. And, you know, and all

that stuff, approved so to speak. But you never know. You never know what you're getting. Whereas we use very very little pesticides. I mean, some things you have to, have to if you want a good crop. But, in general, we use companionable plants like marigolds and it really makes for a pretty garden too because we plant marigold inbetween every tomato plant. Which is really very good, it is sort of the work horse of companionable herbs. Hmm, basil does really good next to tomatoes. It repels flying insects. In fact, Italians put tomato plants in their windows, or basil plants in their windows, because they generally don't have screens so the basil there near the window keeps the flies out. It also works on things like tomato plants. And dill repels cabbage moths so you can put dill around your cabbage and you can use it with your cucumbers to make your pickles. So a lot of it, even the side things that we buy and can or freeze, help us come out ahead.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Herbs in particular are just a rip off at the grocery store. I mean, if you want a little, a little packet of herbs at the grocery store are \$2.99. Whereas you can buy the entire plant, I mean if you want to buy the full size plant and just bring it home, you can generally buy it for \$5 and it will provide with three times. You know, if you really want herbs, you would almost be better off to go to the green house, buy a plant, take it home and strip it clean and you would come out ahead of buying what you buy in the grocery store. And have it much fresher. Um, so we take things like basil from seed each year, plant it out in the garden, then we bring it in the house. Basil will last all winter, so will oregano, but some things, rosemary will last most of the winter. In fact, some years we will just take them back outside and plant them again. For things like parsley which we use a lot of. Two months is about as long as it will last.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: And then we do a lot of storing. Things like potatoes and garlic and onions. Uh, I do bulk onions. Dry. Onions will last pretty long. Onions and potatoes, if you store them in a dry place which is hard now. Generally an attic is a good spot or up in the roof of your garage if it's heated. Um, we'll store it for four months. Which will almost get you through the winter.

LG: Right.

SD: But that's, that's my charter for us to do now. Because we just don't have the attic space right now. We have vaulted ceilings so you can't really hang stuff up there. We dry all our own herbs and we grow probably twelve or thirteen kinds of herbs. Probably stuff that you've never heard of before.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Like parcel which is a great one. We, we don't like the crunchy texture of celery in a lot of things. I love the flavor of celery in tuna salad but I don't really like the texture. And parcel has almost the exact same flavor but it is like parsley. It is like a cross

between parsley and celery or parsley and something. Um, and a lot of things are availability where you can't hardly find flat leaf. True Italian parsley, you can find the triple curled stuff which I don't care for. It's much stronger. And it's got kind of, even more bitter than flat leaf parsley. So we grow it because you can't find it. Some of the pepper varieties I'm trying to find. Um, like, I will botch the name if I try it but the Mexican style peppers that they dry for chili powder: chili peppers. There are several different varieties of those that you just can't find them anywhere. So we grow some of that stuff just for convenience and stuff because you can't find it at a grocery store. Particularly in Mount Vernon. When we lived in Columbus where there are specialty markets and places you can go to find some of that stuff. Um.

LG: And the drying the peppers. Do you put it in a shaker then?

SD: Yeah, generally. Well, we do all sorts of stuff, even after that. I take, uh, got tape left? I take peppers and grind them and fry them in peanut oil. And you're not really frying them. In fact, I just ruined a batch because I got them too hot. But you, um, just simmer it just below where the oil wants to pop. Then you take it off and you cool it, and it makes this pepper oil that we add to, peanut oil is really good for frying stuff like frying fish. Then we will add a tablespoon of this pepper oil into the fish fry

LG: Yeah.

SD: For that pepper flavor. Or we had hot and sour soup last night. We take a big. It's essentially the stuff you get off Hunan. Have you ever? If you ask for pepper oil, you will get it. It is just a really dark liquid—it turns red. Then you add sesame seed oil to it afterwards which is kind of a brownish-blackish liquid. So it is just a real dark color. Just delicious. We love it. So, we make that. We make herb vinegars and fruit vinegars. I make tarragon vinegar which I use in, like bernat sauces and stuff like that. Fresh tarragon is one of the ingredients, one of the things that make bernat and hollandaise sauces where you can approach what you get in a restaurant. As opposed to, if you look at a recipe for a sauce like that, it generally says dried tarragon. Mainly because no place can you really find fresh tarragon. But if you use it, and you learn how to substitute fresh for dried, it is really much better. And the tarragon vinegar, I make dill vinegar of course. And I make rosemary garlic red wine vinegar which is really good for marinating steaks and stuff like that.

LG: Yeah.

SD: And all that stuff. I make my own red wine vinegar. I make my own red wine. Uh, and if you do that, or if you, and this is a good sort of recycling tip, um, if you buy good red wine vinegar that has been pasteurized or active bacteria in there. As you leave an inch in your red wine that you don't finish or it goes a couple days, you pour it in your red wine vinegar and eventually over the course of time, the bacteria acts on the new red and turns the alcohol into acidic acid or something like that.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: So, uh, once you buy the starter, you just kinda keep it going. So that's a good way to do that. And like I said, I make red wine and some of the things we make prevent us from buying. Because red wine you can make and bottle yourself for two dollars a bottle. Even if you buy the grapes. We are going to plant a vineyard. In fact, we've got some grapes growing. I wouldn't call it a vineyard. I'd gotten a garden at my dad's house where I've not strung... But that will eventually be one of the things that we will do is plant a grape arbor and grow, it is hard to grow the benefra here like cabernet. You can grow hybrids like cabernet-blanc. ... they don't grow along this area real well. Gatapa grows as well here as anywhere else in the world. So some of the things like that, we'll plant. Grape juice, you can make your own grape juice by boiling a mixture of sugar and water. And of course, sugar which is relatively cheap and water which is almost free. Um, you boil the sugar and the water together and then you maybe fill up your quart jar with about an inch of grapes in the bottom—concord grapes. Puncture the skins and then just pour the boiling water on top of it. And you put the lid on. And it's amazing because it is just like what you would buy at the grocery store and virtually nothing a quart. So we do some of that. And then when you get to the last bit of cherries that you are canning, we'll make cherry juice and use that in punches or, um, sort of spiced liquor that you're making. So we try and reuse everything. Even beyond canning. We try to let very little go to waste. We're in such a throwaway society. I mean, you can gauge how much money you're wasting on general food by how many times you take out the trash. Um, everything that you throw away you pay for. Whether directly or not, it's included in the price. Um, you throw away the glass jar. Which by the way, I've been looking at the spaghetti jars that we buy and they look very much like they might fit a canning lid.

LG: Yeah.

SD: And I don't know if they're approved for canning. But every now we buy, because when you can spaghetti sauce, you do one or two varieties, so you have to pretty much resign yourself to that being what you're going to have for the rest of the year.

LG: Right.

SD: So every now and then we'll go out and buy a different kind of spaghetti sauce or something like that. But, um, the jar looks very close like you screw a canning lid back onto it. So I'm going to try it sometime and see.

LG: It's hard because you always have to worry about spoilage, you know. So you want to make sure.

SD: You do, but we don't worry about whether the spaghetti can take the stress because presumably, when they put the spaghetti sauce in, it goes through a similar heating process.

LG: Yeah. I'm sure.

SD: And of course, their's has a one piece lid but you can use a two piece lid I assume. But we'll see. I'll update you if it shatters and I lose a quart of sauce, I'll let you know.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Well why not, you might as well try. And that's part of, I'd like to get where I can burn most of my paper and recycle the rest. I am very close to eliminating my trash service. That's one of things, take all of your leftover scraps and compost them to use as mulch. And all your yard scraps so you don't have to have them pick up. I just spread them at my dad's house in the garden. Or mulch. It's actually very good for your yard. Just run over your leaves with your lawnmower and spread them back out. But, um, ideally I would like to stop paying for the trash service. Ideally, you recycle the glass and you recycle the plastics and you burn the paper which you are really not supposed to do but if you use it to start a fire to cook on, it's okay. You just have a lot of. We cook a lot on fire. So, anything I can do to try and, you know, not only for the cost benefit but for the ecological standpoint of, the benefit of recycling and stuff like that. And I have a lot of weird views on that but I won't go into them now because probably wouldn't pertain to the story.

LG: He he.

SD: Well, that's about the end of my monologue. Start me in a new direction here.

LG: Um, are you concerned about having enough time? When you have the baby and you have a full-time job?

SD: Yeah, that's a real good question. No. Yes and no. I'll put it that way. My wife doesn't like to do any of the canning which is. She likes that I do it and she doesn't mind it taking up the time that I have but she doesn't really want to help in the canning. So I do a lot myself. And I do all the gardening myself. Mainly because I have to drive to get to our garden. Uh, we have a small, we probably have a lot or a lot and a half in town, and enough sunny space to plant a small garden but not enough to provide most of the foods that we use so in fact, my dad has a 80 acre farm so we plant a fairly large garden out there. It's about 15 minutes outside of town

LG: Uh huh.

SD: So, uh, don't even make me think of the gas expenditure. That probably beats everything. But it's a hobby too. I like to grow everything. And I would say we save, on average all things considered, at least 2 to 300 a year. Now, if I didn't like it, it wouldn't be worth it.

LG: Right.

SD: If I didn't enjoy gardening, it definitely wouldn't be worth it. But, it, you know, on the other hand, if everything was maximized, we could easily go up to saving \$1000 a year.

LG: Right.

SD: Or more. So, particularly the more people that you have to feed, the more mouths you have to feed, which is probably why there were large families. Economies of scale. The more people you have, the more you can grow, the more healthy. Whereas the canning is relatively quick. Almost all of your work is in the field, especially with the pressure canner. Um, and now the dishwasher is like the greatest thing. Because before I would wash all the jars out and now I have this wash and sanitize so I just load the thing up. Put it on the wash and sanitize it and it does its hour and a half thing and keeps them hot while I'm canning.

LG: Really.

SD: That was one of the main reasons I wanted to get a dishwasher. Before, we had never had one. Just washed them by hand. And, uh, the dishwasher is one of those things that everybody thinks it saves them time but probably really doesn't. By the time you load it up

LG: And rinse everything off before you load it

SD: And rinse everything off before putting it in

LG: Yeah.

SD: You know, whereas if you are having a party, it's great because you can just get stuff out of the way. But

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Preserving it probably doesn't save you that much time between loading and unloading. I don't know, you probably still come out ahead. But, um, so no, I do a lot of, wash all the jars at once. My mom used to, like I do, five quarts of asparagus at once the other night and I just washed the jars by hand because it was faster. And the other thing when you pressure can, you have to get the jars clean but you don't have to worry as much about sterilizing. I do some things where I just hot pack it and seal things. Things like, high acid things like tomatoes, and you're not, and they say you're not supposed to do tomatoes.

[side B]

SD: boil your lids and everything and put them on, and pour it in there boiling and seal the lid and you don't have to process. Same thing with pickles. Anything that's in that

high acid. Well, now the other thing you have to do, with tomatoes, per quart I will add a teaspoon of lemon juice and a teaspoon of salt to bring the acid and to, well, retard bacteria growth and stuff like that. Um, but now, when you're using a pressure canner, you want to get your jars clean but you don't have to go through the same sterilization process that you do if you're going to just hot pack it and close the lid. So that's nice, it saves you a little bit of time boiling water for the jars and, again, the energy that it takes to boil the water for the jars. So, that, it makes, it is pretty time efficient. I guess. Like I did the asparagus the other night and it probably took me an hour and a half, start to finish to can them all. Including the time it spent on the stove by itself. You have to go back and check it frequently but once you get it set and it levels out, um, you don't have to watch it as much as you might think. You have to check on it periodically. But the other thing is, is, the more you do, the large portion of that time is digging out the pressure canner, washing the jars, breaking the asparagus. And the asparagus and stuff I put in without boiling, it's called cold packing it. Then you dump boiling water on top of it and then you process it as opposed to cooking it first. Which takes the same amount, if you do asparagus cooked, you still have to process it the same length of time. So I don't know why anyone would waste their time.

LG: Right.

SD: There's really no benefit to it. Now, you know and the less food is cooked, the more I like it. I do salsa, and you know, you buy salsa, if you make fresh salsa in the summer, you've got your ripe tomatoes and it's much more crunchy, you know, your green pepper is fresh. Which is the way I prefer it. But anytime you bring tomatoes to a boil, there's no way you can keep that crispness. And even when you freeze it, they, I mean you can freeze salsa too. But again it doesn't keep that crispness so you just have to resign. In fact, I have, I'll show some salsa I made the other day.

LG: Yeah. Okay.

SD: You know, green peppers and onion and tomatoes and different kinds of pepper.

LG: And does it all take about the same processing time or do you find that it changes by adding peppers?

SD: Generally, when you're doing, you still cook it, but if you don't cook it beforehand, if you're cooking vegetables, then you go the time that it takes for the longest item. I mean if you put carrots and carrots take ten minutes and green beans and green beans take 40 minutes and something else that takes ten, then you have to do it all for forty to meet the requirement for the green beans.

LG: Right.

SD: In fact, I do like the mix. And it is also sort of part of our kitchen decorations. We've got open, well, sliding glass, um, building hutch. So that the more color things and

texture the prettier it is. I can carrots in part, just because I like the way they look. I mean, I eat them, but there is no real cost benefit to it. I just like the way they look up there.

LG: Yeah.

SD: And I'll can carrots and green beans together. And green beans and corn together. Um, and just sort of anything for that rich texture. I'll can a couple of pints of corn even though I freeze most of it, just for it to sit up there. And for the times that you don't want to go down to the freezer. Our freezer unfortunately is in the basement. And you can't get from the house to the basement without going outside.

LG: Okay.

SD: Um, which will probably change but for now, in the winter, it's nice to have some of that stuff. And, if you lose your electricity in the summer, depending on how much you have in your freezer, you've got a certain period of time. My grandparents, um, when Y2K was coming, you know, they were afraid they were going to lose power. They completely emptied their freezer. And just canned everything. Canned all the meat in it. Which is smart to do. If it's full, you've got about three days before stuff starts to thaw and, again, depending on the ... it will heat up much faster. But if I'm worried about something like that, I take jugs of water and spread them in there. Essentially like the old ice box that they use to have. So I don't worry about that too much. I suppose if there was some sort of world disaster and we would lose electricity, I could can what was in my freezer before it would thaw. So that is not really a concern but it was for them. And they, ah geez, my grandma goes through forty pints of pumpkin. They are really efficient. They won't buy. You know, they're from the depression era. And I think a lot of what they are has rubbed off on me. Because my parents are not, my parents are much more a part of the convenience society.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Whereas they will, they have chickens but they go to Nuffs, the short side of Nuffs, and pick up the scraps--lettuce that's left over from what they put in the display case. Anything that they throw out, anything that they throw out, they'll go out and bring back in. Feed to the chickens as opposed to buying chicken feed. Um, and the same is true for pumpkins at Halloween. People put big, giant pumpkins on their front porches and then Halloween is over, they don't, what do you do with it? They throw it away. But they take it back, can it, make pumpkin for pumpkin bread, pumpkin pie.

LG: Oh wow.

SD: Whatever you make. They won't let anything go to waste. So,

LG: Yeah.

SD: And when you think of it, it is a good way. When you have a roast and when you're done with it, you throw away the bone, whereas you could boil it, you know, and let the last little bits of meat come out and make beef stuff for soup next time or whatever. Can that. But, you know, convenience is the all important motivator today. People just want to buy stuff and take it home and not have to worry about canning it themselves because they want time for whatever their hobbies are. Watching tv or washing the car, whatever it is they like to do in their time, whereas I like to spend my time gardening.

LG: Yeah.

SD: So, for me, in fact, the more I can can, the funner it is. Because the more I can grow without worrying about it going to waste.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SD: But also, some things, I planned a hill of high yield cucumbers, they're pickling cucumbers, that top out at about 3 or 4 inches. Or you can pick them when they're an inch and make those little, tiny, cocktail pickles. But you plant one of those, and there is only so many pickles you can eat in a year. But this hill of high yield will produce just bushels, I give away just bushels of these. Like everyone else makes their pickles from my cucumbers because I have so many left over and I don't want them to go to waste so I trek them around. And giving them to friends and relatives and bring them in here and put them on the table downstairs. Same thing is I put probably 20 tomato plants each year so I have periods where I get to the end of the season and I have everything I want canned and I'll eat fresh but I still have tomatoes that I bring in here to the office and people bring them home if they have gardens. So, you know, you just inevitably have more of some things than you can eat. But you have to plant the minimum to get what you want. Same thing with, like, garden salsa peppers—one of the peppers that is in the salsa. Um, you put one plant and it just explodes with peppers.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SD: You know, they're kind of hot peppers so you can't just sit there and crunch them and eat them all. So I end up giving those away. And, um, if you plant enough to really can, once you're done canning, the plants are still producing. Otherwise, like I could only plant eight tomato plants would probably, 10, would make all that I need to, but I would have to do it in small batches. Not enough would be ready all at once to go in and can the year's worth of spaghetti sauce in an afternoon. And if you can't do it that way, then it really does start to take up your time. Or your batches at three quarts at a time, you always have to go through simmering and peeling it. Whereas I bring back about 40 pounds of tomatoes at a time and that will make all the spaghetti sauce. And in fact, generally, what you do is make all the spaghetti sauce and then you have tomatoes left over so you make tomato juice or tomato paste or

LG: Uh huh.

SD: You know, any other tomato. And I hear people make tomato wine but I just couldn't bring myself to drink it. You can make wine out of almost anything so, um, and it just happens every year. But I am happy to give it away. Um, if I had a green house and I could really make a go of it, I would sell the plants and produce. Because one tomato has enough seeds in it to plant another, you know what I mean, you think about each seed in each tomato has a whole another plant. If you can save one tomato a year, plant all the seeds from it, and just, you know, be overflowing with tomatoes. And the same thing. That is one thing I never did in the past. I always bought seeds. This will be the first year, except for some things. Like marigolds I always save the seeds, they grow just as fast from the seed.

LG: Right.

SD: But things like tomato plants. If you plant just from seed at the beginning of the year, your harvest is put off six weeks. So that is a definite down side to that.

LG: Yeah.

SD: But on the other hand, if you have a green house, you can plant them six week forwards before they're ready to be transplanted. Then you can let them grow in there and you've saved yourself that amount of time. Greenhouse is a very efficient. Part of my study in school. My minor work was in greenhouse management and all the different aspects of that. I have an agricultural degree so maybe that helps in the desire to do all of this. A lot of my classes were agronomy and stuff like that so, but most of the knowledge that you learn, when people want to go about this, is from books.

LG: Right.

SD: In fact, um, I think it's so funny, most of our canning books. All of our canning books that we have now, the main one that is used is called the ball blue book. The ball is sort of the authority on canning. They make jars and lids. I don't know if they make pressure canners, but anything you would need for canning, ball makes. And they produce this book every year in conjunction with the department of agriculture or, maybe once every two years or something like that. Um, and I don't know what it costs now but I think we paid 50 cents for ours at a used bookstore, you know,

LG: Right, right.

SD: So eight dollars you may pay, ten dollars. And used book stores are great because you can find a lot of canning recipes and the old style recipes that, um, don't call for a lot of the preservatives that are now more common. Pickles real common. And I don't know if it is preservatives stringent, I think it is just to make the pickles crisp. But you put alum in it. Which if you use a lot of it, it is kind of hard on your digestive system. Um, but there are other ways. I mean, if you want to take longer, you can take boiling water. Whereas alum, you cut your cucumbers up, you stick them in there, you put half a

teaspoon of alum in it, and it makes them somewhat crisp. Or you can do without it and pour boiling water it the first day and cold water over it three days in a row,

LG: Uh huh.

SD: You know, and it takes like two weeks to make pickles instead of just two hours. In general, the old style is a little better I think. It produces crisper pickles or, um, sauerkraut which I think is the greatest thing. I love sauerkraut.

LG: So do you find that yours is sweeter than the commercial?

SD: My pickles?

LG: Your sauerkraut.

SD: Hmm. I don't know. I wouldn't really say.

LG: Because I had lunch with Juanita Newman, I don't know if you know her, but she, she did sauerkraut for the first time and it was really sweet. She used red cabbage so I don't know if that made a difference.

SD: Oh, okay. That is probably higher sugar.

LG: Okay.

SD: Because I use white cabbage.

LG: Okay.

SD: And there are lots of tricks you have to know about cabbage and planting it. It's a difficult one, lots of worms and moths on it. Um, but, you don't add any sugar. Cabbage, it goes through a fermentation process and essentially you put in five pounds of cabbage, or for every five pounds of cabbage, you put in, I think three tablespoons of salt. I mean you have to use a non-iodized salt. Um, so, it clumps more. No, that's not what causes it to clump. There's another agent that you add, cycilate, to keep it free flowing that pickling salt, that pickling and canning salt doesn't have just pure salt so you don't get your source of iodine from it. But it also doesn't discolor your food or, any of the other, I am sure there are other reasons why you're supposed to use canning salt but, that is one thing I use. But that's all sauerkraut is, it's just cabbage, salt and time. About six weeks of just sort of. You've got to put enough salt in there. It's real tricky. A lot of canning is, um, a formula. Whereas you cook and it is a recipe. You can, you want to add more onion, you add more onion. Whereas you bake, baking is a formula. You add more formula and it won't rise as well or rise too high.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Things will be off. And canning is almost always, um, particularly things like sauerkraut and pickles, is a formula. You can't really deviate from it. You add less sugar and you don't compensate with more salt, then it will spoil because the brine is not as strong. So you have to be kind of careful. And you really have to watch your times. And there's the tendency to round stuff down. To round your processing times down. And that's where you'll get into trouble where you can get sick. Um, particularly with low acid things. Green beans are probably the number one killer of people that die from related home canning. Because it's botulism. It grows in there and botulism is a very powerful poison. And will kill you very quickly. In fact, uh, which is even on a [] which means you heat them up before you can them, the heat kills the botulism and you're okay. But generally, in fact they say, botulism will kill you so quick that they find, uh, or they use to find women with half a green bean in their hand and a pot of green beans on the stove that they opened the jar and put it in there, and had one to taste it, and they just fall on the floor and die. So, we try to be very careful. We have fortunately never lost a jar.

LG: Yeah.

SD: In fact, I had a jar go bad. Not go bad, but I ruined a jar while I was canning it. Every year I will have a jar crack. There is a little split that you can't see. Then it gets under pressure.

LG: Right.

SD: And then it breaks or

LG: So you've never had spoilage?

SD: Never had spoilage.

LG: That's impressive.

SD: Yeah, I mean if you follow the guidelines, it's really safe. How often do you get a spoiled can of green beans that you buy at the grocery store?

LG: Right.

SD: Not very often.

LG: Right.

SD: And it's basically because you go about it the right way and you make sure. There are some little tricks, and the common things that people don't do are, after they fill the jar, they don't wipe off the glass on top. If you get a little grain of salt on it, and it doesn't seal as well, your lid doesn't seal as well, that will cause spoilage. Sometimes people will try and reuse a lid which always leads to spoilage. You have to buy a new lid each time.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Um, unclean jars. Not processing the full time. The ball blue book, in the back, tells everything that causes spoilage. And there are some times that you think you have spoilage and you don't. Like we opened up a jar, and the top of the lid was black on top. And I thought, oh what is this. It didn't look good. The food looked and smelled okay. And we flip the back of the blue book

LG: Yeah.

SD: to see what's going on and it's some natural enzyme that interacts with the lid. Now, they have coated lids so it's not a problem. But it interacts with the metal and causes it to blacken but the food is safe. And, um, food over time will lighten in color if you leave them exposed to sunlight. So that can cause, you know, some of that, what people think is spoiled is really not. So we do all sorts of stuff. A really funny thing, maple syrup, if it molds, you can heat it up to boil, skim it off the top, and it is safe to use again. It's almost, the nearest []. So a lot of things that people throw away

LG: That's interesting.

SD: that they don't need to.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Honey is a big thing that we get. We don't grow it but my grandma has a beehive so we go and get fresh honey every year. Um, just anything that we can: we gather strawberries and blackberries from wild patches and, uh, asparagus, if you know where patches are, grows along the roads. It's a common thing that grows along the roads. So we have a place that we go to each year and get enough for supper and occasionally enough to can if you nobody else has got there. Everyone else tries to go out and hit the same spots. Everyone that knows about it, so.

LG: Right.

SD: That's why I would like to have my own asparagus patch—just walk out there and pick it. Asparagus is also the first thing that comes into your garden generally. So you start getting produce out of your garden in April or, I am not sure exactly when. I know it is something in that late April, early March, early April, or something like that. Um, and then we have a cold frame that we use that lets me. In fact, if you look up on my calendar there, it says, plant salad garden on March 3rd.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: Which, if you have a cold frame, what you have to do, is you dig it down. You set the cold frame about two inches down in the ground. Um, and then you dig about a foot and a half down and you put in fresh manure and you cover it back up with dirt. And as

the manure rots and decomposes, it produces heat that will keep it, for about 2-3 weeks, it will produce enough heat to keep it from freezing up in there. And, generally, if you get into April, the salad, and it's in the cold frame. Whereas the cold frame is the enclosed glass lid. You open up when it gets hot or generally it will wilt your lettuce. Really, we start eating fresh salad about April 1.

LG: That's awesome.

SD: We grow Romaine lettuce and a variety of leaf lettuces. Um, and some other things. Parsley we put in there. And several different semi-bunching leaf lettuce and bread leaf lettuce and spinach, we'll mix in there. And then a lot of times I'll start, if I have extra room which I rarely do, um, I need to build another cold frame, this one is getting kind of small

LG: Uh huh

SD: But I'll start some of the herbs out there a little bit early. Basil, I froze probably fifteen or sixteen cups of basil because we use basil for everything. We dry it too. We have a dehydrator. We dry rosemary and everything else. Rosemary is a real good house plant so we keep it inside too, but, uh, basil we make pestos and you can make full meals out of basil, pesto and pine nuts or whatever. In fact, I am wondering if you can find. Have you ever had pine nuts before?

LG: No.

SD: They're, it's a, grows inside of pine cones and I don't know what particular pine cone. If it's a particular species of pine cone that you have to have. It's, they taste very similar to nuts. You put them in pesto and stuff like that.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Um, kind of light looking things.

LG: And actually, for each article we are looking for a recipe. If you have a recipe that you've created? Like rather than just out of the book but with, like, pine nuts and stuff that you've derived.

SD: Well, I have a recipe for about everything so.

LG: Yeah, no.

SD: Well it's almost all, I start with, with the exception of some of the things like sauerkraut. Um, where it's really, you can't deviate much from the recipe.

LG: Right.

SD: And even then. Even the formula type ones, once you understand what is happening. You have to keep the brine at a certain acidity level, you can start substituting this for that. And, um, salsa is one of the things that we make fresh and can. That's um, my recipe.

LG: Yeah. If you don't mind bringing it in, I would love to make a copy of it.

SD: I could write it down for you.

LG: It's memorized.

SD: But, um, yeah, I will bring it in. Because it will probably take me a while to figure it out.

LG: Okay, that will be wonderful.

SD: But, um, I'm trying to think.

LG: I do want to.

SD: You do want to? Okay, well I have to get something.

LG: Um, do you think you can get your child interested in canning? Are you hoping to

SD: You know, I don't know. Because it's such a, I think they probably will be. There will be a definite ages where it is the least of their concerns. But I think, probably, as they grow older and they get to the marrying age and they get to where, um, I don't know, my sister, obviously same environment growing up. In fact, when she was first born was when my mom did the most canning. And, um, it hasn't taken with her at all. She doesn't, she wants to live in the city, she doesn't want, um. And I think she will eventually be interested in it. But when you live in the city you just can't really take an interest in it.

LG: Right.

SD: And, um, my little sister, I don't know. She hasn't shown an interest in it yet either. Maybe it's a one in three kind of thing or. But I will definitely expose them to it. And I think, you know at the age where they think, you know you have that 10 or 12 years when your child thinks you're just the greatest thing in the world,

LG: Right.

SD: And, uh, you know. That's probably the time that they will be interested in helping whether they are interested or not. You know, they will want to, if you involve them like picking produce or washing or whatever, I am sure they will be up for that. Whether it will take hold later in life

LG: Right.

SD: You know, is up to them. I am very different from my father and very similar in some respects. So what you take and what you don't take, um, you know, can't tell. Little boy on the way.

LG: Okay.

SD: So he may have the same interests as me or he may not be interested at all. You know, growing up on a farm probably predisposes you a little bit. And I don't know if it's, I hate to say it's a gender thing, I doubt it is. There are many, many women farmers. Um, but it could be that that was what I was more involved with. Because my dad was into farming and I helped my dad and my sisters helped my mom. Not because it was forced upon them but because that's where there interests were. So, now, I don't know. Maybe that will make my son more likely than my daughter if I have a daughter. But I don't know.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Who knows. You can't tell what your children are going to turn out like.

LG: Yeah.

SD: So.

LG: And your wife, did she grow up in a city then, or did she grow up on a farm?

SD: You know, my, well, sort of both. She grew up in the city of Belvo which is pretty much farm country. And her mom did a lot of canning. In fact, many of our jars are from her mother. And in fact that is another thing about jars. When you have to spend a dollar to get them, we have some jars that are 25 years old.

LG: Yeah.

SD: 25 years

LG: Do you have any of those old jars with the one piece lid and the rubber band?

SD: No, I don't. In fact, I have just, you have to buy the one piece lid every year. That's the main reason why they went to the two piece lid, is you only have to replace the little thing and that costs about a dime regular price. I suppose they go on sale at some time and if they do, I'll buy, when something like that goes on sale, I will just buy two years worth. You know, it's way more than I need right now

LG: Yeah.

SD: But eventually, it will pay off. And inevitably when I do that, they go on sale like a week later and it's even cheaper. Oh well, it will go back up eventually. Buying in bulk I will come out ahead.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Um, but yeah, I mean, I will can just about anything. We're pretty savvy. We'll go, people have pear trees, and they don't like all the pears so after they eat their fill, they just give it away. And this happened, we went, my grandpa and I went, and we carried away probably about 4 or 5 buckets worth in pears. And that's why I had so much pear butter at the time. They were winter pears so they weren't really suitable for peeling and halving or quartering. Very hard. Once they were cooked for a period of time, they were okay. But they might have done all right. They were so small that by the time you peel and cut them up, you will have to have done hundreds to get, you know, enough for ten quarts. So, I didn't mess with them. I just cut them all up and made them into pear butter. But, the other thing is, in terms of being savvy I say. Um, you generally need food milk. The old hand crank. They make them now, all stainless steel. They're about 40 or 50 bucks

LG: Right.

SD: For a quart and a half one. And I got mine at a antique store for eight dollars. So, you know, if you're willing to take something that's used. In fact, mine's a, I like it much better than the newer ones because it's much heavier gauge.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SD: And I feel like I can really crank on it harder.

LG: Yeah.

SD: Um, the nice thing about the newer ones is that, when I am done with mine I have to oil it. I have to put vegetable oil on it to keep it from rusting. You know, I wipe it on and then I kinda wipe it off. Otherwise it will, not really rust, just corrode. Whereas, stainless steel you don't have to worry about that. Other than, you know, something like salt will affect stainless steel but if you wash it afterwards. But again, it is sort of a tradeoff. For me, for eight dollars. I probably could have bought it cheaper at an auction. I buy a lot of stuff at auctions but, um, you know, just to try and not spend any more money than we have to. My wife is going to be staying, uh, at home most of the time with our children. So we will lose 15,000 a year, I mean, or more.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SD: Um, or less. Who knows. She will be working three days a week. Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

LG: Uh huh.

SD: But we won't have to pay day care. So it's kind of a trade off. A lot of families say they're better off, will come out ahead, by having one family member stay home.

LG: If the person's willing. It's hard too.

SD: I would be willing. I would love to stay home.

LG: Really?

SD: If Amy ever said, "I'm tired of this, why don't you stay home?" And, unfortunately her job doesn't provide any health care benefits or stuff like that. So I'm pretty much the one that is stuck working. But, um, I don't think she would like to stay home full time.

LG: Yeah.

SD: I think that would be too much. You're too isolated. You need some.

LG: Yeah, I think, just for me, I need more stimuli. You know, I know raising a kid is a full time business, but.

SD: It is. But amazing, you know, the people that stay home with the kids, they are always the ones that say they're the busiest. You know, people say, "Oh I can't do that, I'm too busy." And I think, how can you be? You need to go back to work to appreciate what you have at home. Because you know. Uh, but maybe is relative. Maybe no matter how busy you are, you feel busy.

LG: Hm hmm.

SD: I mean, people who live in Alaska and spend all winter inside feel busy. God I've got all this word to cut.

LG: he he he.

SD: Whatever it is that keeps them busy. But it is probably a relative thing. Stress is just ingrained in us and you can never live a stress-free live.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SD: And deal with it. But, I try to approach it. In fact, that's why I work here. I took a ten percent pay cut to move back to Mt. Vernon from Columbus. I could make much more, um, working in Columbus. I was kidding my wife, she took partly a similar or even more pay cut, um, so it cost us a significant amount of money to live the life style that we want. But now I go from driving two and a half hours a day to Columbus and working forty-five hour weeks to driving fifteen minutes and working 35 hour weeks for Kenyon. So, I

uh, have four hours of my day back. To me, that's worth ten percent of money. An hour to sleep, an hour and a half to sleep, and the rest in the evening. So, it's, you know. An hour lunch. I go home each day and have lunch each day with my wife.

LG: That's awesome.

SD: To me, you know, I would have taken as much of a pay decrease as I could take and get by to live this sort of life style. And that's what, just what I want. My children my want different. My siblings want different. I mean, they prefer to work 50 hours a week and buy their food and other things. I mean, we, just beyond canning a lot of our food and out of necessity, we wouldn't be able to afford the things that my siblings do. We'll never have, um, a new car every two years and a 5000 dollar oven. Whatever it is, whatever your desires are.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SD: We will probably never have that. Because my income will beat. But eventually I will have to work more. As I take on more responsibilities, it's inevitable. In fact now, I work 35 hours a week but often times it is more than that. Weekends. Um, but, you know, all in all I am happy now. I like home canning. I mean it is a pleasure and economic reasons. The food is unbeatable.

LG: Yeah.

SD: You really can't, you know in fact. I love pie. And rhubarb pie which many people shun.

LG: Oh. So good.

SD: You like rhubarb pie?

LG: Yeah.

SD: Good rhubarb pie, rhubarb pie is the easiest to mess up. It is so easy to make bad rhubarb pie. But um, rhubarb is one of the things we grow. It grows great, you just can't eat the leaves. It will kill you or make you real sick. But things like that. You try and buy a canned pie filling like cherry or peach or anything, it is not nearly, nearly as good as what you can make. And also, my wife makes all of her own crusts. She makes the pie filling from what we canned over the summer. So whenever we go anywhere, whenever we're having a potluck with family, it is Amy's responsibility to bring the pie. Because it's all, you know, handmade crust and homemade pie fillings. And you can't just, no one else can compete shy of doing the same thing.

LG: Right.

SD: For quality reasons, just canned pie crusts aren't very good.

LG: Right, I talked to one woman, Marcia Brown, and one year because of the drought, they didn't have as much corn as usual so they ran out in the winter.

SD: Uh huh.

LG: With their cans.

SD: Oh yeah.

LG: And, uh, her family couldn't handle it. Like, she tried all sorts of different brands from stores.

SD: Frozen, yeah.

LG: And they couldn't eat any of it so she switched to mixed vegetables.

SD: Are there a lot of other people that you've interviewed that can the same way? Same quantity as we do?

LG: Um.

SD: In fact, I will show you. I've got a list of our quantities.

LG: I have interviewed four people so far. Some people in Fredericktown and a woman in town.

SD: What is the irony of me managing my home canning preserving on the computer. You know. The best of both worlds.

LG: I think it is so interesting. So you don't sell?